



Waukesha County

Humane Officer's Corner

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Disaster Animal Response Training

This spring I attended a three day Disaster Animal Response Training (DART), conducted by the Humane Society of the United States. It was held at the Haws shelter in Waukesha. In addition to classroom learning, all those in attendance were tested with a mock disaster exercise on the last day. In this Humane Officers Corner, I'd like to share some of what I learned in this class. I hope it inspires you to do more than just think about a personal disaster plan. Class attendants were instructed to break down their planning into "do-able" chunks. Block out time on your calendar and complete one chunk at a time until you have a complete plan in place.

Our instructors addressed the needs of animal organizations and community resources, but personal plan building follows the same steps. And it's not like anyone has start with blank paper. There are plenty of websites that have plan frameworks already created. The goal here is to build the plan to suite your personal needs and responsibilities. A point emphasized during our training was to be able to be self-reliant for at least 3 days following a local emergency. Consider your family's food, water, medicine, pets, heating, sanitation, communication and lighting needs. Now factor in a mandatory evacuation, and see how things get very complicated very quickly!

I had good luck approaching this planning the same way I plan for a camping trip or vacation. Figure out whom you are responsible for, identify group and personal needs, and make a general game plan. Start pulling components together a little at a time, so it doesn't get overwhelming.

One website I direct people to is www.hsus.org. Click on HSUS in the field, then select HSUS Disaster Center. It contains great information for people who own animals. Try the Disaster Prepared Quiz and see where your plan needs work. The Red Cross website is www.redcross.org/disasterservices. Their planning framework puts more of an emphasis on human needs. Prioritizing care for people helps the animals in the long run. People whose needs are met can step up to provide for the animals.

Disasters come in all sizes so plans need to have some flexibility built in to them. I hope you will take this article to heart and start building your written plan today. Let's hope we never have to use them! Jill